

Ducks wrestle in first Civil War match of season

The Ducks kick off a busy winter break with the first of two Civil War matches and a tournament in Reno

Wrestling

Mindi Rice
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The Civil War is on its way. Oregon hosts its half of this season's wrestling Civil War matches Friday to lead into winter break.

The Ducks will have a busy three weeks, as they also host No. 8 Nebraska, travel to No. 6 Michigan, and participate in a challenging tournament.

"Our student athletes are excited to get started, to get wrestling," head coach Chuck Kearney said. "I wouldn't say they're tired of wrestling each other, but the competition is what it's all about. They're really excited about it."

Oregon and Oregon State split the two dual meets last year, each squad winning at home. Oregon State won a close match that was tied at 16 by virtue of a criteria-g tiebreaker. The Ducks won the second competition 18-14.

Oregon finished second in the Pac-10 Conference last year, behind Boise State. Arizona State finished third, and the Beavers were a distant fourth.

Oregon State has lost two of its top wrestlers — Casey Horn at the 141 weight class and Micah Houston at 157 — for the season. Horn is still recovering from injuries he suffered last season, while Houston decided not to return for his junior year.

On Dec. 14, Oregon hosts Nebraska for another dual meet. Last year, the Ducks traveled to Lincoln, Neb., and won another tie match. Oregon earned the victory by a criteria-b tiebreaker when the match stood at 24.

Oregon has already seen Nebraska this season. Both teams participated in the Nov. 30 Mat-Town USA Classic. Oregon sophomore Shane Webster won his match with No. 2 Travis Pascoe from Nebraska.

The Ducks will travel to Reno, Nev., for the Dec. 19 Reno Tournament of Champions, their third tournament of the season.

Reno hosts a yearly weekend of college and high school wrestling competition. The Tournament of

Champions college competition features 23 teams this year, with four of the teams ranked in the top-25 by The Wrestling Mall.

No. 10 Arizona State and No. 22 Boise State lead the Pac-10 into the competition. Those teams will join Oregon, California Polytechnic, California-State Fullerton, California-Davis, California-State Bakersfield and Portland State as the Pac-10 enters eight teams in the meet. Only Oregon State and Stanford are missing the meet.

Reno also features No. 1 Oklahoma State and No. 21 Edinboro, whom the Ducks competed against in the Nov. 23 Body Bar Invitational.

After Reno, Oregon will have two weeks off before traveling to Ann Arbor, Mich., on Jan. 4 to battle the No. 6 Wolverines.

The Ducks want to make up for the 30-9 loss to Michigan last year at McArthur Court. Brian Watson and Eugene Harris, who both graduated in 2002, and redshirt senior Eric Webb were the only Ducks to score points in last year's match.

Oregon's squad this season features three wrestlers ranked nationally by The Wrestling Mall in their weight class. Redshirt junior Jason Harless is ranked 18th in the 125 class, while Webb is ranked 10th in the heavyweight class. Redshirt senior Tony Overstake, who dropped from 157 to 149 this season, is ranked 16th at 149.

All three of last year's seniors were big point scorers for the Ducks and made appearances in the NCAA Championship meet.

"We've got people able to step in," Kearney said.

While Oregon lost three wrestlers with national experience, five with NCAA exposure return to the squad among the 18 returning team members.

Oregon will return to Eugene in time for winter term, and will participate in one last tournament before fully entering the dual meet season. The Ducks have 12 dual meets in a row before the Pac-10 tournament begins March 2. On their schedule, the Ducks battle the Pac-10 and travel to the Midwest to take on No. 4 Oklahoma and Oklahoma State.

For now, the Ducks will focus on Oregon State and Nebraska and hope to kick off their dual meets with a pair of wins at home.

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald.

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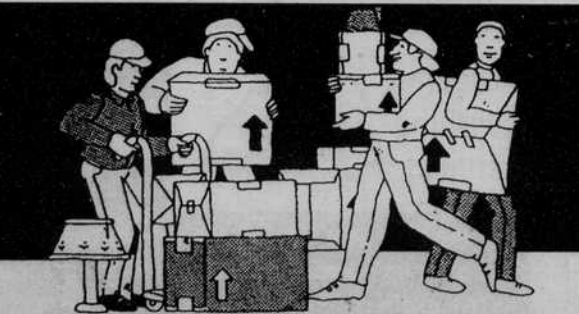
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